

ADVANCED
WINDOWS

INTRODUCTION

With the popularity of email, the appeal of the office fax machine has diminished. It hardly seems worth walking across the office to waste time feeding pages into a faxing device when an email can be sent from your desktop so quickly and efficiently.

However, there are occasions when only faxing will do. How else, for example, might someone send a hard copy of an important signed contract to anywhere in the world in seconds? Scanning and emailing the document is more hassle than hitting the Send button on the fax machine, and it would require ready access to a scanner. There may also be times when documents need to be sent for review by someone who doesn't own a computer, or who uses different or incompatible software.

There's still a place for fax technology in today's world. But you don't need to have a fax machine; you can use your PC to send and receive faxes. Your computer probably already has everything you need to get going – just follow Scott Colvey's instructions.

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Send and receive faxes in Windows XP

The humble fax may not be as popular as email, but sometimes it's the best way to get your message across. **Scott Colvey** explains how to set up Windows XP's fax services

If you have a PC running Windows XP, it can be turned into a powerful fax machine quickly and easily. Once set up, you'll find it's possible to send faxes directly from any application, eradicating the need for documents to be printed before being fed into a fax machine.

Moreover, while traditional fax machines generally require plenty of user interaction to send batches of documents, with a PC-based fax system it's simple for streams of faxes to be automated in all manner of ways and sent when it suits you best, so you can take advantage of off-peak phone charges.

If your PC receives faxes, you needn't fear losing the tail end of incoming documents when paper runs out. A modern computer's hard disk can store thousands of received pages. All in all, faxing with a PC is a worthwhile endeavour. Best of all, it's straightforward.

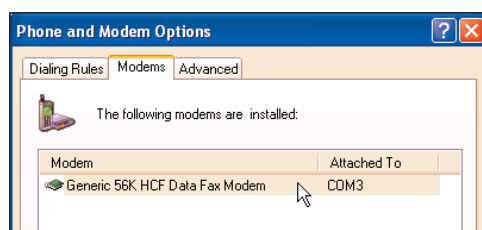
SENDING FAXES

Your PC will need a fax-capable modem, otherwise known as a fax modem, and Windows XP. Basic fax facilities exist in earlier versions of Windows, but Windows XP has a larger range of options. If you're confident that your PC has a fax modem, and that it is connected to the phone socket, you can skip to the 'Essential software' section below.

LOCATING THE MODEM

In these days of broadband internet connections, few people use old-fashioned modems, so it's possible you may not even know if your PC has one. Fortunately, finding out is easy and there are a couple of ways to do it. Open the Phone and Modem Options dialog box in the Windows Control Panel and click the Modems tab. A list of installed modems will be displayed. If you see a fax modem listed, peer round the back of the PC to find the modem's line connector. If you have an internal modem, you'll find a small, square socket on a blanking plate or near the keyboard and mouse connectors.

Don't confuse the modem socket with an Ethernet network connector, which is a marginally wider socket. If you don't have a fax modem, internal and external models are available cheaply. Expect to pay around £20 to £30 including VAT. External models are easy to install, but internal models aren't exactly complicated to fit and they take up less space.



▲ Check your PC has a fax modem installed by clicking the Printers and Other Hardware link followed by Phone and Modem Options within Control Panel

CONNECTING TO A PHONE LINE

A modem needs to be connected to a telephone line. The requisite cable should have been supplied with the PC, but if you've never needed it before, there's every chance it's been lost. If so, head to a high-street electrical retailer and pick up the necessary cable, which shouldn't cost more than a few pounds. You need a cable with an RJ11 (modem connector) plug on one end and a BS6312 (BT phone plug) on the other, but asking for a computer modem cable should do it.

Ensure you buy one long enough to stretch from the PC to the phone socket. Alternatively, pick up an extension cable of a suitable length. You might also want to invest in a socket-splitter so the PC's modem can share the phone socket with a phone.

Plug the RJ11 plug (the small one) into the modem socket on the PC and the BS6312 into the phone socket.

ESSENTIAL SOFTWARE

You'll need software to handle the sending and receiving of faxes. These days commercial packages are thin on the ground. The most well-known is WinFAX Pro 10. This offers just about everything the would-be PC-faxer requires, including junk fax management and support for network faxing, which is useful in office environments. It costs £42 including VAT from Symantec (www.symantec.co.uk).

The Professional and Home editions of Windows XP include very good fax software. Windows Fax Services has a lot of features for a virtually unknown giveaway. With Fax Services installed, you'll be able to send and receive faxes, manage a queue of fax jobs and schedule faxes to be sent at particular times of day. Unless you have specialised needs, it's unlikely you'll benefit from spending money on an application such as WinFAX. We will explore some of the benefits of using third-party fax software on page 216, though.

USING FAX SERVICES

With a modem connected to the phone line and Fax Services installed in Windows XP (see the walkthrough opposite), you're ready to send and receive faxes. Fax Services is so well integrated with Windows that you can turn almost any document in any application into a fax ready for transmission by clicking the Print command. There's a little more to it than that, but clicking Print is the first step. A special printer driver then converts your document into a bitmap image for fax transmission. Whatever is in the original document will be sent, including formatted text and graphics.

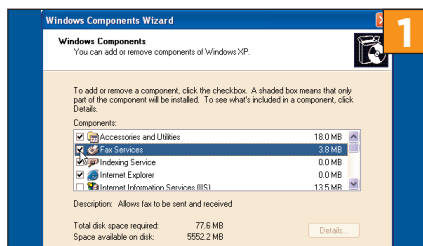
Fire up an application such as WordPad or Microsoft Word and type a few lines of text in readiness for faxing. You'll need to know the telephone number of the device you'll be talking to, which can be a traditional fax machine or another PC connected to a phone line and set up to receive faxes. Open the File menu and click Print. In the Print dialog box, click the drop-down selector next to the Name label and choose Fax. As with printing to a real printer, you can select a

HOW TO...

Set up Fax Services

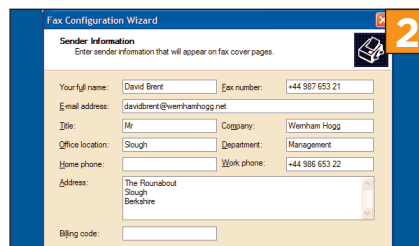
1 To send and receive faxes in Windows XP, you need to activate Fax Services. To do this, open Control Panel and click Add or Remove Programs. Now click Add/Remove Windows Components and tick the Fax Services option before clicking Next. You may be prompted to insert the original Windows XP installation disc, so keep this to hand.

2 The Fax Configuration Wizard should launch. If not, click Start followed by All Programs, Accessories, Communications, Fax, Fax Console. Open the Tools menu and select Configure Fax. Click Next to begin the wizard. Tap in the appropriate details on the Sender Information dialog box, bearing in mind that some of this may be transmitted when sending faxes. Click Next when you're done.



3 If the computer's fax modem is not already pre-selected, use the drop-down menu to pick the right entry. If you want to both send and receive faxes, ensure the appropriate boxes are ticked. Use the radio buttons to choose whether you want to answer incoming phone calls manually or have the PC do it for you after a certain number of rings. Click Next.

4 The next two windows are concerned with transmitting and called subscriber identifications (TSID and CSID). These are descriptive labels for your fax system that will be transmitted when sending (TSID) or receiving (CSID) faxes. These should be the same, but type in different labels if you want senders and recipients to see different IDs.

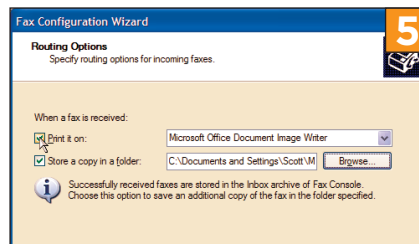
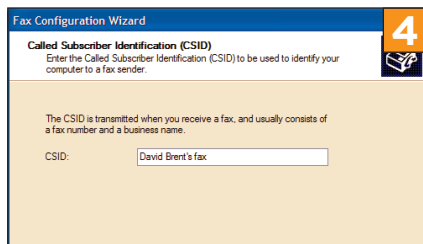
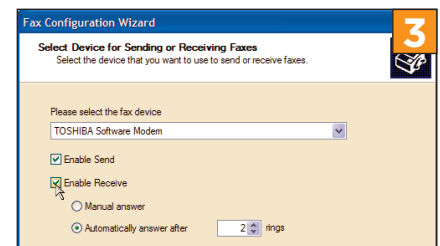


5 The penultimate window tells Windows how to deal with received faxes. You will not see this if the Enable Receive option was left unticked in Step 3.

To have Windows print all incoming faxes, tick the 'Print it on' option and select the appropriate printer from the drop-down list to the right. Don't click Next yet.

Alternatively, you can have Windows save all received faxes as TIFF files by ticking the 'Store a copy in folder' option. Click the Browse button and use the Browse For Folder window to select the desired folder. When you're done, click Next.

6 The wizard is now complete, and Fax Services is set up and ready to roll, so click Finish and you're done.

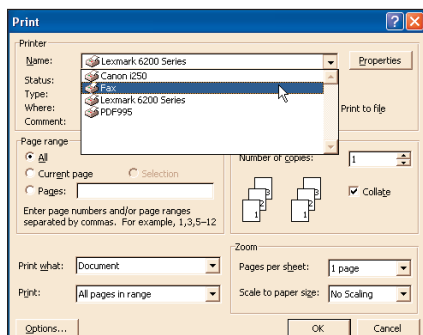


ranges of pages to be faxed, along with the number of copies. For now, just click OK.

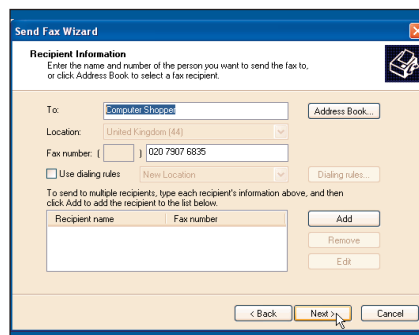
The Send Fax Wizard launches. Click Next and tap in the name of the person to whom the fax is targeted in the To box of the Recipient Information dialog. Type the full telephone number, including the dialling code and any international dialling suffix, which should be prefixed with a '+' symbol.

You can add recipients from the Windows Address Book by clicking the Address Book button, although the chosen contacts need to have the appropriate telephone numbers included in the fax fields of their records. Multiple contacts can be added, each appearing in the distribution list at the bottom of the Recipient Information dialog. Use the Add, Remove and Edit buttons to amend items here.

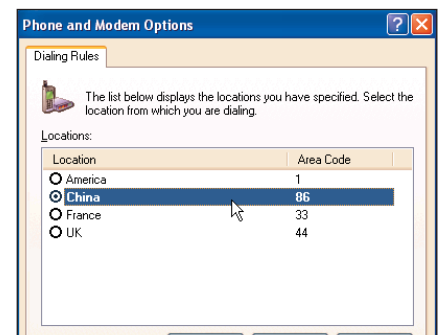
Note the 'Use dialling rules' option on this window. A tick placed here, followed by a click on the Dialling Rules button, fires up the Dialling Rules tab of the Phone and Modem Options window. This is handy when sending faxes from different places around the world. However, it can also serve non-globetrotters who may want to have the modem on their work laptop dial 9 for an outside line when in the office.



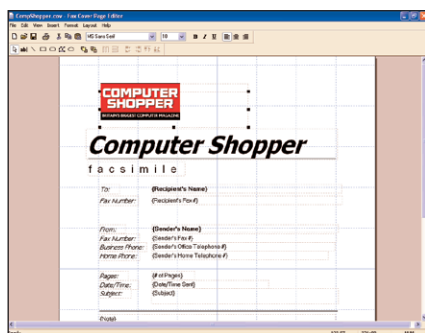
▲ Once Fax Services has been set up, the process of sending a fax begins by clicking the Print command. Choose Fax from the drop-down list of available printers and then click OK



▲ Type the recipient's name and fax number into the appropriate boxes. Frequent travellers may wish to use the dialling rules tickbox to specify location-dependent dialling patterns



▲ Dialling rules may prove useful for those who travel widely. You select your current location from the Phone and Modem Options dialog box



▲ Use Windows XP's Fax Cover Page Editor to design cover pages for transmitted faxes. Recipients in large companies may find these useful

TEMPLATES AND COVER PAGES

Click Next and you'll be presented with the Preparing the Cover Page window. It's not necessary to send a cover page, but where a fax is being sent to larger organisations a clear cover page can help ensure it finds its way through the company's internal mail system.

If you want one, click the 'Select a cover page...' option and choose a preset template from the drop-down list below. Click the Sender Information button if you wish to tweak the identification details delivered to the receiving fax machine. Use the entry boxes provided to type a fitting subject line for the cover page, such as "Fax to John Smith about Wednesday's meeting", along with any notes.

You can design your own templates, which will appear in the list of presets, using the Fax Cover Page Editor. This is found within the Fax program group in Accessories, Communications on the Start menu. This has basic WordArt-style graphics and text-layout tools, so you can create a personalised cover page complete with contact details and company logo. Remember, though, that PC faxes can be sent direct from almost any application, so it's possible to have a prepared Word document serve as a cover page.

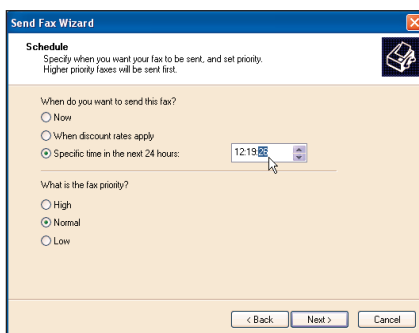
SCHEDULING FAXES

The final page of the Send Fax Wizard allows you to schedule whether the fax should be sent now or at a later time. The 'When discount rates apply' option limits the sending of faxes to a time window. Specify this by right-clicking the Fax entry in Printers and Faxes from the Start menu, and click the Properties button on the Devices tab. While you have this window open, you can also alter the resolution of sent faxes by clicking Printing Preferences. A lower resolution will result in faxes being sent more quickly but at the expense of quality.

When you've made your choices in the Send Fax Wizard, click Next then click Finish. Depending on your previous selections, the fax will be sent immediately or queued for sending later. For more information on what happens next, see 'The Fax Console' below.

ALTERNATIVE SOFTWARE

As we've seen, Fax Services in Windows XP is a tool with some flexibility. But for the serious fax addict, more-advanced software does exist. Symantec's WinFAX Pro 10 is the primary commercial alternative. It offers an Outlook-style interface for faxing tasks, with fanatical attention to detail concerning the nuts and bolts of multiple-destination faxing and fax sending and receiving schedules.



▲ Faxes can be sent immediately or scheduled for a specific time. Use the Fax Properties dialog in Printers and Faxes to set the discount rate period

WinFAX also offers several features lacking in Fax Services, such as the option to append scanned signatures to documents automatically, although you can emulate this in Fax Services. It also includes a dedicated macro that integrates with Microsoft Word's mailmerge function, so it's possible to automate the creation of personalised faxes intended for long distribution lists. This is not practical with Fax Services.

Finally, the scheduling and logging facilities in WinFAX are considerably more extensive than those offered by Fax Services, although you'd have to send and receive faxes virtually non-stop to benefit from them.

RECEIVING FAXES

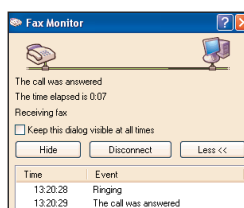
You're likely to want to receive faxes, too. With Fax Services running the show this is generally a hands-off affair, although there are a few issues to be considered. If you didn't tick the 'Enable Receive' option in Step 3 of the walkthrough on page 215, you'll need to do so; we'll explain how in a moment.

When the line to which the PC's fax modem is connected receives a call, Fax Services jumps in to answer it after the specified number of rings, unless you opted to answer incoming calls manually. This highlights a problem of using one phone line for both telephone and fax calls. You don't know if an incoming call is a fax or a human, who won't appreciate an earful of a screeching fax modem trying to communicate with the electronic buddy it expects.

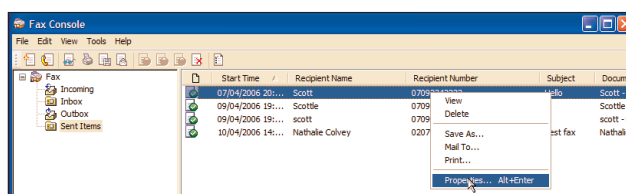
There's no easy way around this. Automatic fax switches that can distinguish between fax and voice calls are rare these days. The once-popular Avro Fax Friend is sadly out of production. However, a company called Laserprinter Services of Belfast (www.lps-belfast.co.uk) claims to have a 'substantial' stock of Fax Friends at £59 a pop. We also found a few for sale on eBay at around £30 to £40.

THE FAX CONSOLE

Regardless of how an incoming fax is answered, when Fax Services kicks in it displays the Fax Monitor



▲ When an incoming call rings on the line to which the fax modem is connected, the Fax Monitor will kick in



◀ The Fax Console is the place to keep an eye on all fax-related activity on your PC. View sent and received faxes, or reconfigure the fax modem's settings

Faxing over the internet

Aside from using Windows' own fax features, there are numerous other ways to exploit fax technology with your computer. You don't even need a fax modem to send and receive faxes from a PC.

Go to www.efax.com, for example, and you'll find a comprehensive fax receipt service available for free. Once signed up, you're issued with a 'personal' telephone number, which will be non-geographic or local, depending on the package you choose. Any faxes sent to this number are forwarded as email attachments to your email address and can also be viewed online. However, eFax users must use a proprietary plug-in to view these attachments. Faxes can also be sent via eFax, but you have to pay for this service; prices start at £7.50 per month, and there's a destination-dependent, per-fax charge.

In many ways, the offering from www.yac.com is better. It allows users to send and receive faxes. You can also opt to receive faxes as TIFF or PDF email attachments, which is useful, especially if you rely on a webmail account to pick up emails and faxes. Yac's fax-sending service is cheaper than eFax's, with a monthly subscription of £6 plus a destination-dependent charge for each sent fax. New users get 100 free credits.

window to show the call's progress. This is the same window you see when sending a fax and it keeps a log of all dialled and received calls. What Fax Services does with a successfully received fax depends on the options chosen in Steps 5 and 6 of the walkthrough on page 215. The document will be output to the chosen printer, saved as a TIFF file in the selected folder, or both.

At this point, it's worth familiarising yourself with the Fax Console, where you can view and manage all sent and received fax documents. Launch it by clicking Start, All Programs, Accessories, Communications, Fax and Fax Console. The navigation pane down the left-hand side is ordered like Outlook, with an Inbox and Sent Items folder. Click these entries to see the contents in the main viewing pane, where summary details are displayed. Double-click any

entry in the viewing pane to open the fax document, which is stored as a TIFF file, or right-click and select Properties for more information.

It's possible to reconfigure the fax options specified previously by launching the Fax Configuration Wizard. Select Configure Fax from the Tools menu so you can change your old settings. ☐